

THE MEASURE

A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Poems by Witter Bynner, William Alexander Percy,
Raymond Holden, Elizabeth J. Coatsworth,
Louise Bogan, and others — — — — —

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NUMBER 24

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Snow Mark

THEY say there'll be as deep a fall of snow
As this year's Indian Flowers are high—and here
They've reckoned depth and height enough to know.
The flowers are growing extra tall this year.

Slender, with small white clusters at the top,
They point occultly to the unseen place
Where snow, unformed, unfallen now, will stop.
The clusters just suggest snow-crystal lace.

These meadows will be blown and drifted steep.
These reaching flowers are such small seed to sow
Toward that great harvest only heat can reap—
The massive, myriad-flowered wreaths of snow.

—*Louise Townsend Nicholl.*

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Four Capri Impromptus

I

SWEET as the furze flower fainting in the noon heat,
The yellow furze flower tufted in a cliff above the ocean,
Floating its too sweet perfume over the peacock waters
And weakening the diving swallows half down the air—
So sweet, so weakening the breath of you comes to me, beloved,
When I lean over you, or even, even when I dream of you, my flower.

II

Mournful and miraculous beauty bathes the sea
When the rose-misted sun melts out
And for one perfect moment—
While two swallows can eddy and plunge their white breasts
From the cliff-crest to the beach—
The waters are misty rose for infinite miles
Save for the silver chariot tracks of the winds;
Curving and leading nowhere and always silver,
But edged, how strangely, with keen victorious green.

III

Just over the gray cliffs
In the blue brumal air
Glistens a faint unwilling Hesper,
His curls bound with a fillet of white fire.
Along the sky his steps seem slow
Like a young sulky god's,
So I should see him as he stands a moment
Dreamily on the cliff top, between the two twisted stone-pines.
There he may pause and watch the blue lilies of the twilight

Like sleep-flowers on the fields of the still sea,
Blue-gray like sleep-flowers on the mountain flanks
And the coves of the unwindy coming night.
There I have stood on other evenings
Watching a long time the lonely twilight.
But the young Hesper has no heart to look.
Barely I saw his silver instep touch the top
And he was gone—
Running, running, not pausing for a glance,
Down the dark other side of the sheep-strewn cliff.
He is no shepherd:
He had no tawny wisp of net over his arm,
No net to cast in the foam-flowered breakers from the beach
Like a fisher-boy.
I think he has some love far down on the tilted side in the darkness
To whom he hurries—
A nymph perhaps, maybe another star
With floating hair and a girl's silver body.
Surely with such a single amorous haste
Before the night is over,
Even before the Pleiads tremble up,
He will be with her,
Lying, I dare say, greedily,
The sweat-beads pearling still the curve of his shoulders
And his breast still heaving.

IV

I shall bring you blue morning-glories ribbed with purple,
Or hazy-blue plumbago flowers.
But they will not please you: they have no perfume.

Shall I search higher and twitch a spray of golden gorse?
The bees cannot leave it
And it is sweeter and more golden than their honey.
Or I know a cleft above the sapphire ocean
Where grows one shoot of the wild oleander.
Its flowers are crimson pink:
Some say it is Adonis' blood that they are dipped in,
Others, more rightly, Aphrodite's own.
And their perfume when full open in the noon heats
Has often made a passing dryad drowsy.
Pan never nears their shadow except on tiptoe—
He has made lucky finds in their sleepy shade.
But you—none of these will content you,
Neither the blue morning-glories
Nor ash-blue clusters of plumbago
Nor gorse that is golden yellow
Nor blood-rose oleanders.
How shall I hope that my heart shall please you
Which is less lovely than these
But not less quickly withered?

—*William Alexander Percy.*

Wild Honey

STILL in my fingers the stings
Still in my ears the sound
Of bees and their wings.
Still in my temples the pound
Of hatchet swings.
Still in the trees the sigh
Of silences.
Still from the hive of the sky
Darknesses swarming the trees
And among these
The owl's cry.

O, Heart, Heart, Heart!
Let me more easily
Lift hands and part
The hanging certainty
And strength of home
Whereto I come
From the enchanted bed
Of stranger Beauty, she who sleeps
Forever in the deeps
Of heart and head!

Still in my ears the sound
Of bees, in my heart the pain
Of one more passion found
And lost again—
Lost and gone with the bees
To swarm strange trees of lonely
Planets unseen from these,
Leaving me honey only
And a starless breeze.

A Glance Toward Middle Age

WHAT ritual does a sweet-thighed quietness keep
Inviolat in the household of the blood
That from forced marches made through field and flood
In the service of things bodily and deep
The living self, unsatisfied, returns
And is by one inestimable glance
Struck reverent out of attitudes of dance
And cool in an occasion whose touch burns?
Ah, this beloved miracle, this peace!
What fearful beauty fortifies its power
That the young conscript whom its hands release
Stands awed and colorless as if a flower
Bent and grew brittle in a challenging breath
Of Autumn, like a death yet not a death.

—*Raymond Holden.*

Lines Untitled

TIME was long before I met her, and is longer since we parted,
And the east wind has arisen and a hundred flowers are gone;
But the silk-worms of spring will weave until they die
And every night the candles will weep their wicks away.
Mornings in her mirror she sees her hair-cloud changing
Yet she dares the chill of moonlight with her evening-song . . .
It is not so very high from here up her Fairy-Mountain¹ . . .
O, blue-birds, be listening! — Bring me what she says!

¹Peng Lai.

North Among Green Vines

WHERE the sun has entered the western hills,
I seek the straw hut of a monk;
But only the fallen leaves are at home,
And I turn through chilling levels of cloud . . .
I hear a stone-gong in the dusk,
I lean full-weight on my slender staff . . .
In this world within a grain of dust,
What of my love, what of my hate?

—*Li Shang-yin*

(*Translated by Witter Bynner and Kiang Kang-hu*)

Face

A face I know
Has the peace of an autumn dusk
Or fallen leaves
The face is without rebellion.

Its loveliness comes to me on sandaled feet
As warm rain.

I laugh and the face runs one way.
I cry and it runs another.
When the stream has captured a hushed magic
The face comes close to me.

—*Benjamin Rosenbaum.*

Hill-Born

BACK to this mould, this matrix whence I came,
I come again. — Like solder where it spills,
My being hardened in among these hills
When God took off my metal from the flame
And poured me out like silver: presently,
My outline fixed forever, I was I,
Stamped by this rocky corner like a die,
Shaped by these five hills and this edge of sea.

Oh, strange how hills and man's heart interlock
Inveterately — how rock can bestow
Its contour on his spirit quick within!
Yet so it is: hill-men have always been
Like nuggets fashioned by their chinks, or snow
Packed in the star-like crevice of a rock.

—*Abbie Huston Evans.*

Storm in the Hills

CLOSE on the heel of night there came
A white witch gone astray—
So wan, so wild she was,
Lost in the solemn circle of the hills
Far up the gorge I heard her come,
Her footsteps in the rush of rain,
Her breath caught in the sudden hush
Of winds that fled before her fierce dismay.
The poplars blanched at her white look
And shuddered back
In terror of her hair . . . her furious, strange hair . . .
The brook was mute—or whispered, and so low
You scarce could hear it as it ran,
Grey-silver to the moon, to hide
Among the watchful firs;
The frightened clouds stole swift and still
Up the black shoulder of the hill,
And then,
While all the valley cringed in fear
Of her mad mood, she wept—
I saw the moonlight on her tears!

—*Frances Dickenson Pinder.*

Ultimate Dictation

WAIT, Fortune! One last word ere you decamp
 (Altho the last is *yours*, by woman's due)!
Take out your stylus, trim the loose-wick'd lamp,
And deep upon your waxen tablets stamp
 My last instructions in our interview.

When your ungainly messenger receives
 His burden to deliver on the earth,
Let him not flap his way past frosted sheaves
In bare November's storms, nor past young leaves
 All blackened in mad March's bitter mirth.

No, let him stretch his spindling legs in June
 When windows will be wide and doors ajar!
Then we will welcome him with hearts a-tune;
For thru that month high memories are strewn,
 And in it first we glimpsed the evening star.

—*Arthur H. Nethercot.*

Spanish Fashion

THEY tell me it is spring,
 That the snow is melting from the mountains
And the birds once more returning—
But I do not believe them,
I who sit in the shadow of your frozen heart.

—*Elizabeth J. Coatsworth.*

Facts

FIGURE this out:

There was a man who loved horses,
And dogs with big brown eyes,
And cold winds over the fields in autumn;
And between riding upwind and stroking a dog's head in the firelight
He found time to get married,
And have three children,
And grow old with deep wrinkles under his eyes.

And there was a man who smoked long pipes,
Sitting in his study by an oil lamp,
Turning old yellow pages
And brushing the dust from his knees;
And between Plato and Robert Browning
He found time to get married,
And have three children,
And grow old with deep wrinkles under his eyes.

Tonight the dead leaves scratch on a pair of tomb stones,
And only a wry-faced moon hears the wind talking,
Talking about dogs and horses,
Talking about Plato and Robert Browning.

—*William A. Norris.*

The Frightened Man

IN fear of the rich mouth
I kissed the thin,—
Even that was a trap
To snare me in.

Even she, so long
The frail, the scentless,
Is become strong
And proves relentless.

O, forget her praise,
And how I sought her
Through a hazardous maze
By shafted water.

The Romantic

ADMIT the ruse to fix and name her chaste
With those who sleep the spring through, one and one,
Cool nights, when laurel builds up, without haste,
Its precise flower, like a pentagon.

In her obedient breast, all that ran free
You thought to bind, like echoes in a shell.
At the year's end, you promised, it would be
The unstrung leaves, and not her heart, that fell.

So the year broke and vanished on the screen
You cast about her; summer went to haws;
This, by your leave, is what she should have been.
Another man will tell you what she was.

—*Louise Bogan*

The Market Place

Cambridge, England

WHAT barter does this moonlit market keep?
What men are these? They do not come by day;
Here in the moonlight, while the townsmen sleep,
They haunt old stalls, and buy, and go away.

Their minds are changed with centuries of rest:
They do not reckon over loss and gain.
They only know that silence now is best:
And, undisputed, purchases remain.

They walk about, a moment loosed from dreams.
Their garments are all silver with the moon.
But, ah, the city of their slumber seems
More sweet than this, and when the sudden tune
Of bells has flung the hour across the square,
Naught but the moonlight is discovered there.

—*Harold Lewis Cook*

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